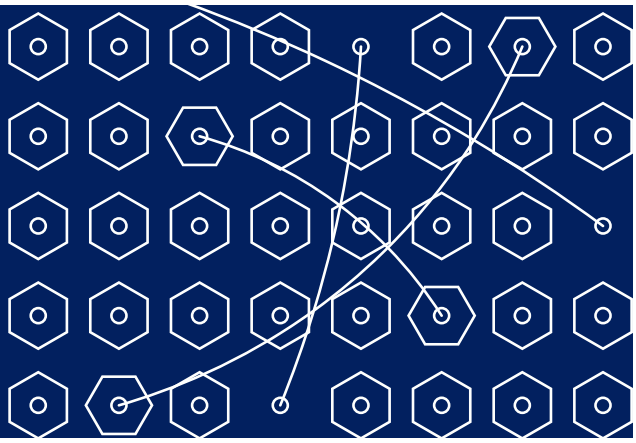
PPI Press Statement | No.68

on access to information in The Gambia 2024



Media Statement from Public-Private Integrity (PPI) in Commemoration of World News Day 2024

Public-Private Integrity

Press Statement Regarding
Access to Information in The Gambia

Date: 30 September 2024 **Location:** Banjul, The Gambia **For immediate release**

The Access to Information Act of 2021 is now in force, and a respected Commission has been formed to diligently carry out the Act's provisions. Unfortunately, the entire process is facing challenges. In this press statement marking World News Day, Public-Private Integrity urges the Government of The Gambia to take prompt and comprehensive action to improve the channels for accessing information without barriers. To foster a clear and fair right to information, we want to emphasize the following key points.

Government agencies in The Gambia are failing to adequately provide official contact details for public officials. This lack of transparency hinders initiatives aimed at improving accountability, visibility, and accessibility within public service. Thus, PPI calls on the government to encourage all public officials to follow the recent example established by the State House by making their official contact information, including email addresses and phone numbers, accessible to the public.

Public-Private Integrity is highly focused on the need for clearly defined confidentiality provisions in Gambia's laws to prevent misuse and to protect the public's right to access information. This concern extends to both regulatory and other legal frameworks. It is essential that these definitions are straightforward and unequivocal.

The civil society organization is calling on the government to remove the requirement for a letter when seeking information that is already publicly available but held by public officials. PPI argue that this letter requirement creates an unwarranted obstacle for those seeking data and information and a flagrant violation of Article 1: Right to Access Information. To encourage fair access to information, the organization urges the Gambian government to cultivate a culture where public officials facilitate easy access to data without bureaucratic hindrances.

The organization is increasingly worried about the widespread hoarding of data and information within the public service. This mindset is a violation of Article 4 of the Act that mandates public authorities not to withhold information. The government must tackle the issue of data hoarding and

guarantee that information is readily available upon request, with costs covered by the applicant when necessary.

To ensure complete access to public information, especially regarding completed and ongoing projects or programs, as well as data stored in libraries nationwide, the Government of Gambia must take the essential steps needed—if they haven't already—to implement changes that allow for easy access to information in both print and online formats. This is crucial for fostering accountability, transparency, visibility, and accessibility.

Personalized laptops and mobile phones should now be provided to all officials by the government through the relevant department. Granting them access to tailored technology is long overdue. This initiative will promote information sharing and a sense of ownership, particularly since many officials have a history of leaving their offices and deleting all their data. Furthermore, it is advisable for the government to set up a remote monitoring facility to gather all information, including decisions made during each official's term. To prevent public officials from erasing data or information, the government must implement all necessary measures to safeguard national data and information effectively.

In line with both local and international laws and regulations, the Government of The Gambia must safeguard individuals' rights to access information without encountering any bureaucratic obstacles. To fully uphold the right to information while ensuring accountability, transparency, visibility, and accessibility, Public-Private Integrity urges the Government of The Gambia to promptly put these measures into action.

End of Statement

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About PPI

Public-Private Integrity (PPI) is a civil society organization dedicated to the collective pursuit of effective and efficient anti-corruption initiatives in The Gambia. The organization engages in a range of activities, including research and investigation, raising public awareness, providing legal assistance, promoting development and skills, and advocating for policy reforms. Our efforts are

grounded in the anti-corruption treaty laws endorsed by the Government of The Gambia, along with relevant national legislative frameworks.